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ABSTRACT

The Cleveland Public Schools developed a family literacy program to address the needs of both parent and child and attempt to break the cycle of illiteracy. Fifty parents who were Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)-eligible participated in the project. They attended one of four 9-week sessions. Course content included literacy, preemployment and job search activities, child development and parenting, and self-awareness and self-esteem. All participants showed at least one grade level gain in reading and math at the end of the 9-week period. All completers enrolled in a high school completion program following participation. Parents demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge about child development, parenting skills, and parent child interaction as measured by performance in the classroom. All completers developed an Individual Education and Career Plan and showed evidence having more focused short-term goals. A small number of the preschool children evidenced some growth in developmental skills as a result of participation in this project. A continuation of the program and a second project were planned. (YLB)

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A FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

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CE 058 813

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A FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT

FINAL REPORT

PROJECT SUMMARY

The following information summarizes the key components of the project.

Local Need

Cleveland City School District has a large number of school age children from disadvantaged families who qualify under Title I. Many of these children have parents who are illiterate or marginally literate and unemployed. Research supports the theory that parents' interaction with their children as well as their attitudes towards school influence children's success in school. Parents are the primary educators of their children. Their ability to read and meaningfully interact with their children influences the child's language development and acquisition of language skills and ultimately their performance in school. A Family Literacy program can address the needs of both parent and child and can attempt to break the cycle of illiteracy.

Objectives

1. To improve the basic literacy, reading comprehension, and communication skills of parents of pre-school age children.

2. To prepare parents to be the primary educators of their children by presenting techniques and content relevant to child development and parenting.

3. To complete individual assessment and job search activities for each adult to guide them in writing and implementing an Individual Education and Career Plan.

4. To provide pre-school children appropriate kindergarten readiness activities and to provide the opportunity to interact and participate with their parents in a classroom setting.

Activities & Timeline

1. Offer four 9 week sessions (12 hours per week) from September,1989 - June, 1990 to 60 JTPA eligible non-high school graduate parents of pre-school age children.

Course content would include:

Literacy, communication, and basic skills
Pre-employment & job search activities
Child development & parenting
Self-awareness & self-esteem activities

2. Provide students opportunities to participate in extensive assessment activities leading to goal setting and development of an Individual Education and Career Plan.

3. Place students in academic classes, vocational training, post-secondary programs, or employment upon completion of the 9 week session.

4. Offer on-site pre-school instruction for participant's children.

Evaluation Plan

The success of this project will be measured by the following factors:

1. Students' performance on pre and post administration of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE).

2. Teacher's observations of adult's interaction with their children in structured parent-child activities.

3. The number of student successfully completing the 9 week session.

4. Children's performance on pre and post measures and teacher observations.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Director - M. Judith Crocker, Ed.D. Supervisor of Adult and Continuing Education Cleveland Public Schools. Ten years experience as teacher, counselor, administrator in adult ABE and vocational programs. Certified teacher, counselor, and educational administrator.

Asst. Director - Katherine McWilliams, B.A., Coordinator of Family Life Program, Cleveland Public Schools. Twenty years experience as adult vocational teacher and program coordinator. Experience as in-service educator for many school districts in the state.

Teaching Staff - A teaching team comprised of certified, experienced ABE and Family Life teachers will be utilized. Only one teacher will be with the class at a time, however, three teachers will worked with the students during the course of the nine weeks. Selected teachers had participated in the Family Literacy pilot program and were experienced in the holistic approach to basic education as well as pre-employment curriculum.

Child care provider - An experienced, trained nursery coordinator from the Family Life staff worked with the children and the parents under the direction of a certificated teacher.

PROJECT OUTCOMES IN RELATION TO EVALUATION PLAN

1. Fifty parents participated in this pilot project. All participants showed at least one grade level gain in reading and math at the end of the nine week term. All completers enrolled in a high school completion program following participation in this project. Approximately 60% attended enough to earn high school credit during the semester following their participation in the project.

2. Parents demonstrated a significant increase in knowledge about child development, parenting skills and parent child interaction as measured by performance in the classroom. Little observation was done with parent and child due to the young age of the participant's children. (Most were under age 2).

3. Forty one students (82%) participated the entire nine weeks or until the end of the term. Since students could enroll during the first three weeks of the session, some students participated only 6 weeks. All completers developed an Individual Education and Career Plan and showed evidence of being more focused in terms of their short term goals. All were able to set some goals and develop a plan for goal accomplishment. For most the first goals was to complete high school, secure employment and enter a post-secondary training program.

4. A small number of the children (25%) evidenced some growth in developmental skills as a result of participation in this project. The young age of the children limited what could be accomplished and measured within this structure.

SUMMARY

This project met a need unanticipated when the proposal was submitted and it probably was the greatest strength of the project. Cuyahoga County began implementation of the LEAP (Learning, Earning, and Parenting) Project in the fall, 1989. Young mothers under age 19 received a monetary incentive to remain in high school and they were penalized if they did not attend. Many of these young women had not been in school for a couple years, some had more than one child, and most were reluctant to return to a traditional school setting. Although Cleveland Public Schools has programs for this population, for some students they did not meet their needs. This Family Literacy project provided another alternative for these women. Although the intent of this project was to serve adults over 21, due to the LEAP project and other factors, the entire group was under 21 for the duration of the project.

Another factor contributing to the young age of the participants was the site selected for the project. The Max S. Hayes facility houses the Work Study Program which serves primarily out of school youth ages 18 - 21. Although adults do attend the GED class, English as a Second Language classes, and the high school classes, they are outnumbered by the youth. The population in the school is thought to have been a deterent to older (over 21) parents recruited for this project. Due to the young age of the participants, few had children over two thus impacting another objective of this project in that it was difficult to do pre-school readiness activities with the very young children.

It was expected that the participants would be functioning at a very low level. However, it soon became apparent that the majority of students were at or above grade level. In spite of their lack of formal schooling (many never went beyond 9th grade) they were functioning at a secondary level in reading and/or math. The instructional materials identified for this project had to be replaced with more advanced materials. Curriculum pieces addressing health issues were added because of the interest expressed by the students and their lack of knowledge in this area both for themselves and their children.

This project provided these students an opportunity to develop good attendance habits, to review basic skills prior to re-entering high school, and to transition into a structured learning environment in a sheltered, comfortable manner. The primary teacher for this project developed a good rapport with the students and provided support and encouragement to them as they attempted to deal with the myriad of problems confronting them each day. Participants reported that they appreciated the attention, concern, and support they received in this program. Some indicated that if they had had this in their previous school, they might not have dropped out. The structure of the program allowed the students to develop a sense of belonging. The group interaction activities provided them the opportunity to share and learn from one another and members of each cohort became very close and a support system for each other.

The classroom activities related to pre-employment and career choice helped them to focus on goals and to begin to plan for their future. Most of the students had no goals and had never considered any plans beyond the immediate needs. They were introduced to the possibilities available through higher education and to many careers choices. The means of gaining admission and financial aid for higher education were also presented to them.

The follow-up conducted by the teacher indicated that most completers attempted to remain in the Work Study alternative high school program after the Family Literacy project. The women had many problems to deal with which interfered with their potential success in school. Personal and family problems from parents, boyfriends, and children often interfered with school. Substance abuse, legal or financial problems, and sometimes a second pregnancy deterred them from regular school attendance. Calls and visits were made to provide support and encouragement and to assist the women in securing help from outside agencies when appropriate. It was thought that the additional support provided by this project contributed to the women's success in school. The counselor indicated that they seemed to be more diligent than similar students who had not participated in the project.

Due to a lack of space at the Max S. Hayes facility, the class was held in an area at the end of the hall rather than in an enclosed classroom. The teacher felt that this hindered the students' progress and the success of the class. Students were easily distracted and it was more difficult to create a sense of comaraderie in this setting. Additional walls were scheduled to be constructed prior to the beginning of school. Due to budget problems this work was never accomplished.

Project Continuation

In spite of the shortcomings, the overall consensus was that this project was successful in meeting the needs of a segment of the young parent population. It is planned that a similar program will continue at Max S. Hayes in the fall. The young women will participate in many of the classes with the other students and will have a set time each day or week when they will meet as a cohort to review issues related to parenting, child development, and goal setting.

A second project is planned at a community site. This project will be targetted to the older (over 21 year old) mother with children ages 2 - 4. The curriculum and approach will be similar to that piloted in this project and some adaptations will be made to meet emerging needs of the population. The county is now implementing the JOBS program and AFDC mothers will need to be in school or training to continue receiving their benefits. A similar program at a community site should meet the needs of this population, prepare their children for school, and prepare the parents for entering full time school or the labor market as the children enter school.

A great deal was learned from this project. This experience should contribute to the success of the programs planned in 1990-91 and strengthen the family literacy curriculum.